



GIRO 2009 Edinburgh

Kirsty Gray takes a look at some interesting facts and figures about Edinburgh.

Edinburgh, Scotland's capital city, has been chosen to host the 2009 GIRO Convention. Many of you may already be familiar with Edinburgh from student days studying actuarial mathematics and statistics at Heriot-Watt University or as tourists to the capital. Whether you are new to the city or revisiting an old friend, I hope you find some of the following facts and figures of interest.

Brief history

Around 340 million years BC the rock on which the castle stands was created by volcanic activity, however, it was not until around 600 AD that there was a historical reference to a fortress on the rock.

Edinburgh was given its name by the Angles who captured the city in 638 AD. The city was granted a Royal Charter by Robert the Bruce in 1329

and became the capital of Scotland in 1437. When James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England in 1603, Edinburgh continued to have its own parliament until the Act of Union in 1707.

In 1977 the Scots voted in a referendum for Devolution and in 1999 the Scottish Parliament was opened by the Queen. The Scottish Parliament can pass laws affecting Scotland on a range of domestic issues such as health, education and prisons and can raise or lower the basic rate of income tax by up to three pence in the pound.

Financial services

Edinburgh is a key centre for financial services. The headquarters of many banks and insurance companies are located there including the Royal Bank of Scotland (which was founded in 1695), AEGON UK, Standard Life, Scottish Widows,

Intelligent Finance and many others. It is also a major centre for business process outsourcing activities.

Universities

There are more than 40,000 undergraduates at the three main Universities in Edinburgh: the University of Edinburgh (which was founded in 1583 and is one of the most prestigious Universities in the UK), Heriot-Watt University (which started as the School of Arts of Edinburgh in 1821, became a University by Royal Charter in 1966 and is renowned for having the first department of Actuarial Mathematics and Statistics in the UK) and Napier University (which has evolved from a technical college into a major university with three faculties: Health, Life & Social Sciences; Engineering, Computing & Creative Industries; and Napier University Business School).

Tourism

During the festival season in the summer, Edinburgh's population almost doubles from around half a million to one million people as visitors and performers from all over the world descend on the city. Whether you are interested in jazz, film, theatre, comedy, art, books, politics or the Military Tattoo, Edinburgh has something to offer.

Edinburgh castle is the most visited tourist attraction and sits at one end of the Royal Mile. At the other end sits the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the Queen's official residence in Scotland, which is close to the Scottish Parliament Buildings.

Found on the Royal Mile, the Heart of Midlothian is a heart-shaped mosaic built into the pavement. It marks the site of the 15th century Tollbooth of Edinburgh, demolished in 1817, which was the administrative centre of the city and also the site of public executions.

Each year crowds of around 100,000 gather in Princes Street to welcome in the New Year with music and dancing taking place. At the stroke of midnight fireworks are launched from Edinburgh Castle and the city's surrounding hills, and the traditional New Year song, 'Auld Lang Syne' (originating from the lyrics of Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet), can be heard all along the street.

There are a wide range of other interesting places to visit including Princes Street Gardens, the Scott Monument, the National Gallery, Camera Obscura, Arthur's Seat and the Edinburgh Vaults.

A new tram route is currently under construction which will run between Edinburgh airport and the city, however, this means that currently Princes Street is being dug up and works there are not expected to be completed until November 2009.

Sport

If you are interested in sport then you can see rugby or athletics at Murrayfield Stadium, or if football is more to your liking then both Hibernian and Heart of Midlothian are based in Edinburgh.

Scotland is the home of golf and has been played there since the 14th century. Around Edinburgh there are several world renowned courses including Gullane, the Open Championship course at Muirfield and the Open Qualifying course at Dunbar.

Famous faces

A number of famous people were born or raised in Edinburgh and include:

Sciences

Alexander Graham Bell, famous for his pioneering work with the telephone.

John Napier, the mathematician remembered for the invention of logarithms.

Actors

Sean Connery, famous for playing James Bond.

Ken Stott, a film and television actor.

Rory Bremner, an impressionist and comedian.

Ronnie Corbett, the comedian famous for being in 'The Two Ronnies'.

TV presenters

Nicky Campbell, presenter of 'Watchdog'.

Kirsty Gallagher, presenter of Sky sports news.

Magnus Magnusson, famous for hosting Mastermind.

Musicians

KT Tunstall, singer and songwriter who also won the Ivor Novello Best Song award for writing 'Suddenly I See'.

Bay City Rollers, 1970's pop group famous for wearing tartan.

Authors

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Sir Walter Scott, author of Waverley.

Ian Rankin, author of Inspector Rebus crime thrillers.

Irvine Welsh, author of Trainspotting.

Sports

Gavin Hastings, former Scottish Rugby captain.

Chris Hoy, Scottish track cyclist and Olympic medal winner.

Graeme Souness, football player and manager.

Gordon Strachan, football player and manager.

Miscellaneous

William Burke and William Hare, the serial killers who sold the bodies of their victims to the medical college for dissection.

John Knox, the protestant reformer.

Adam Smith, the economist and author of the Wealth of Nations.

Tony Blair, British Prime Minister 1997–2007 born in Edinburgh in 1953.

Weather

The weather in Edinburgh is renowned for being windy but not nearly as wet as the west coast, however, October is usually the wettest month with approximately 12 inches of rainfall and a temperature of around 10 degrees celsius.

The advice, therefore, is to wrap up and take a strong umbrella with you when you explore the city.